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ABSTRACT

In response to a nationwide concern for quality education and academic preparedness, the Ohio State Board of Education created in 1983 the Early English Composition Assessment Program (EECAP) for improving the writing competency of exiting high school students. Faculty from more than 15 two- and four-year institutions and many more high schools participate in this expansive collaborative project, which involves teacher inservice instruction and student writing evaluations. At Lorain County Community College, the program began with intensive sessions on holistic grading, followed by the assessment of the first control group of 1,500 and a second population of 3,000 in 1984. During the assessments, students write in response to a topic selected from several chosen collaboratively by the program steering committee. Each essay is evaluated by one college faculty member and one high school English teacher who have attended an initial writing assessment workshop or viewed a videotape of the workshop. All essays are evaluated twice by each reader, first holistically and then analytically. They then note strengths and weaknesses on an assessment sheet, copies of which are kept by the college, returned to the school, and returned to the student. Schools also receive a computer printout providing a profile of writing competency levels and writing strengths and weaknesses in that school and in the county as a whole. Since 1983, more that 28,000 Ohio students have been assessed, and 300 teachers have been involved in the inservice and assessments. (HTH)

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LORAIN'S EECAP: ASSESSING THE WRITING COMPETENCE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ITS HISTORY AND IMPLEMENTATION

by
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OHIO'S EARLY ENGLISH COMPOSITION ASSESSMENT PROGRAM, CALLED EECAP, IS WELL INTO ITS SECOND BIENNIUM. MORE THAN FIFTEEN TWO-AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS SERVICING MANY MORE HIGH SCHOOLS ARE PARTICIPATING IN THIS EXPANSIVE COLLABORATIVE PROJECT FUNDED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ADMINISTERED THROUGH THE OHIO BOARD OF REGENTS.

IN RESPONSE TO A NATIONWIDE CONCERN FOR QUALITY EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS, THE BOARD CREATED THIS PROGRAM AS A WORKABLE SOLUTION FOR IMPROVING THE WRITING COMPETENCY OF OHIO'S EXITING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

FOUR FACTORS BROUGHT ABOUT THIS URGENCY TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF ACADEMIC UNDERPREPARATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN 1982:

-ONLY 1 OUT OF 8 "HIGHLY ABLE" SENIORS DECIDED TO GO TO COLLEGE AND ONLY 1 OF 2 WHO BEGAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE COMPLETED IT.

-AS MANY AS HALF--ALMOST 2/3 AT LCCC--OF INCOMING FRESHMEN REQUIRED SOME REMEDIATION.

-"A NATION AT RISK" (APRIL, 1983) RECOMMENDED "STRICTER AND QUANTIFIABLE" STANDARDS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

-ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL REPORT ON EXCELLENCE (OCTOBER, 1984) STUDENT PERFORMANCE HAD FALLEN IN 11 OF 15 MAJOR SUBJECT AREAS OF THE GRE, <u>THE GREATEST DECLINE IN SUBJECTS REQUIRING HIGH VERBAL SKILLS</u>.

MANY PROFESSORS BLAMED THIS DILEMMA ON HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS WHO IN TURN BLAMED IT ON GRADE SCHOOL TEACHERS WHO IN TURN BLAMED IT ON PARENTS WHO BLAMED IT ON BIRTH TRAUMA. YET, THERE WERE NO MODELS FOR COLLABORATION, NO CENTRALIZED FUNDING SOURCE, NO UNIFORM STANDARDS OUTLINED, AND NO MONEY. JUST <u>HOW</u> WERE WE TO MAKE STUDENTS BETTER PREPARED?

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THEN, IN OHIO THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND THE OHIO BOARD OF REGENTS CONVENED A COMMISSION IN EDUCATION OUT OF WHICH CAME A TASK FORCE ON ENGLISH CHARGED WITH DEVELOPING EXPECTATIONS FOR FRESHMAN STUDENTS AND OFFERING MEANS OF TEACHING THEM.

IN 1983 THE OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATED OVER ½ MILLION DOLLARS TO DEVELOP ARTICULATION BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES TO REDUCE REMEDIATION. THEY HAD A TWIN MISSION:

1. IDENTIFY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THEIR JUNIOR YEAR SO THAT INTERVENTION STRATEGIES CAN BE WORKED ON DURING THE YEAR.
2. UTILIZE WORKING RELATIONSHPS BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES TO DEVELOP MINIMUM COMPETENCY STANDARDS.

WE WERE FORTUNATE IN THAT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ALLOCATED $300,000 PER YEAR TO BE DIVIDED AMONG THE PROGRAMS.

YET, STATE FUNDS PROVIDED ONLY 1/3 OF REVENUE.

COLLEGES AND DISTRICTS HAD TO COME UP WITH THE OTHER 2/3 IN MATCHING FUNDS OR IN KIND.

THESE FUNDS PAID FOR RELEASE TIME FOR TEACHERS TO TAKE PART IN IN-SERVICE ACTIVITIES AND TO ASSESS STUDENTS' SAMPLES.

AT LCCC DR. DONALD PALUMBO HEADS A TEAM OF 11 COLLEGE AND 42 HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS REPRESENTING 19 SCHOOLS. A STEERING COMMITTEE OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS HELPED DIRECT THE PROJECT. THE PROGRAM BEGAN WITH INTENSIVE SESSIONS ON HOLISTIC GRADING, FOLLOWED IN FEBRUARY 1984 BY THE ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST CONTROL GROUP OF 1500 AND A SECOND POPULATION OF 3000 SEPTEMBER 1984. THE ASSESSMENT TOOL OFFERED A HOLISTIC AND ANALYTIC EVALUATION OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

METHOD OF ASSESSING STUDENT COMPOSITIONS

STUDENTS WERE TOLD IN ADVANCE OF THE TWO WRITING SAMPLE DATES (IN SEPTEMBER AND APRIL), WHAT THE MANNER OF ASSESSMENT WOULD BE AND THE PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT, AND WERE SHOWN THE WRITING COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT SHEET THAT WAS LATER RETURNED TO THEM, COMPLETED, AFTER THEIR SAMPLES HAD BEEN EVALUATED. THEY WERE TOLD THEY COULD USE A DICTIONARY. ON EACH ASSESSMENT DATE ALL STUDENTS TO BE ASSESSED IN EACH SCHOOL WERE GIVEN A SUFFICIENT QUANTITY OF PAPER AND A SHEET WITH TWO TOPICS, EACH OF WHICH INVITED A RESPONSE IN THE SAME RHETORICAL MODE. THESE TOPICS, TO WHICH ANY STUDENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO RESPOND, WERE CHOSEN COLLABORATIVELY BY THE PROGRAM STEERING COMMITTEE AND KEPT CONFIDENTIAL UNTIL THE ASSESSMENT DATES. SOME TOPICS WERE:

1. Describe an important choice or decision you had to make. Explain why you decided as you did, and discuss the effects of your choice.

2. Describe a goal you have set for yourself. Explain why you want to reach that goal, and discuss the plan you have for achieving it.

EACH STUDENT HAD FORTY MINUTES TO RESPOND TO ONLY ONE TOPIC. AS THEY PREARED THE STUDENTS TO WRITE, PROCTORS ENCOURAGED THEM TO USE THE FULL FORTY MINUTES TO PRODUCE A WELL-DEVELOPED WRITING SAMPLE AND TO USE SOME TIME TO PLAN, PROOFREAD, AND EDIT THEIR RESPONSES.

EACH ESSAY WAS EVALUATED BY ONE COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBER AND ONE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER FROM A DIFFERENT SCHOOL FROM THAT ATTENDED BY THE STUDENT WRITER. BOTH READERS HAD PREVIOUSLY ATTENDED AN INITIAL WRITING ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP OR VIEWED A VIDEOTAPE OF THE WORKSHOP. THE COLLEGE ACTED AS A CLEARING HOUSE, COLLECTING AND DISBURSING THE WRITING SAMPLES AND COMPLETED ASSESSMENT SHEETS. ALL ESSAYS WERE EVALUATED TWICE BY EACH READER, FIRST HOLISTICALLY AND THEN

ANALYTICALLY, AND NO MARKS WERE MADE ON THE SAMPLES. HOLISTICALLY, EACH SAMPLE WAS ASSESSED ON A FOUR-POINT SCALE: "4" INDICATES THAT THE SAMPLE DEMONSTRATES A LEVEL OF WRITING PROFICIENCY THAT IS "HIGHLY COMPETENT"; "3" INDICATES THE LEVEL OF WRITING PROFICIENCY IS "REASONABLY COMPETENT"; "2" INDICATES THE LEVEL OF WRITING PROFICIENCY"COULD BE RAISED TO A LEVEL OF REASONABLE COMPETENCY THROUGH SOME REMEDIATION"; AND "1" INDICATES THE LEVEL OF WRITING PROFICIENCY "COULD BE RAISED TO A LEVEL OF REASONABLE COMPETENCY ONLY THROUGH EXTENSIVE REMEDIATION." THE QUALITY OF WRITING EXPECTED OF FRESHMEN ENTERING COLLEGE WAS THE STANDARD OF PROFICIENCY AGAINST WHICH THE STUDENT WRITING SAMPLES WERE COMPARED. AFTER ASSESSING THE SAMPLE HOLISTICALLY, EACH READER NOTED ON THE ASSESSMENT SHEET AREAS OF PARTICULAR WEAKNESS EXHIBITED IN THE SAMPLE BY CHECKING A BOX OPPOSITE ANY OF SEVERAL ITEMS LISTED: "THESIS STATEMENT," "USE OF SPECIFIC DETAIL," "PARAGRAPHING," "SENTENCE STRUCTURE," "VERB USAGE," "PRONOUN REFERENCE," "OTHER GRAMMATICAL FAULTS," "DICTION," "PUNCTUATION," "CAPITALIZATION," AND "SPELLING." SPACE WAS PROVIDED ON THE ASSESSMENT SHEET FOR A READER TO IDENTIFY STRENGTHS EXHIBITED IN THE SAMPLE OR TO ELABORATE ON ANY IDENTIFIED WEAKNESS. (A WRITING SAMPLE SHEET IS ATTACHED.) THESE CRITERIA WERE SELECTED COLLABORATIVELY BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE BECAUSE THEY FELT THEY PINPOINTED COMMON WEAKNESSES IN HIGH SCHOOL WRITING AND BECAUSE RESULTS COULD BE MORE EASILY TABULATED BY COMPUTER.

THE COLLEGE RETAINED ONE COPY OF EACH ASSESSMENT SHEET FOR COMPUTER ANALYSIS AND RETURNED TWO COPIES OF EACH TO EACH SCHOOL. THE SCHOOLS RETURNED A COPY OF EACH ASSESSMENT SHEET (TWO ASSESSMENT SHEETS PER STUDENT) TO EACH STUDENT, WITH A SHEET DEFINING THE TERMS CONTAINED ON THE ASSESSMENT SHEET (SEE ATTACHED), IN A BRIEF COUNSELING SESSION. SCHOOLS RETAINED THE OTHER COPIES FOR FUTURE COUNSELING, FOR PLACEMENT OR WRITING LAB PURPOSES, AND FOR USE BY THE STUDENT"S SENIOR ENGLISH TEACHER. EACH SCHOOL ALSO RECEIVED A COMPUTER PRINTOUT THAT PROVIDED A PROFILE OF WRITING COMPETENCY LEVELS AND WRITING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN THAT SCHOOL ONLY AND IN THE COUNTY AS A WHOLE. INDIVIDUAL AND SPECIFIC SCHOOL RESULTS OTHERWISE

REMAINED CONFIDENTIAL.

AT THIS DATE MORE THAN 28,000 STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ASSESSED IN THE STATE OF OHIO AND 300 TEACHERS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED.

Lorain County Early English Composition Assessment Program

High School District Code: _____
Student Number: _____
Assessment Date: _____

Assessed by_____(Initial)
High school teacher_____; College faculty_____.

This writing sample exhibits a level of proficiency that

- ☐ 4 is highly competent.
- ☐ 3 is reasonably competent.
- ☐ 2 could be raised to a level of reasonable competency through some remediation.
- ☐ 1 could be raised to a level of reasonable competency only through extensive remediation.

This writing sample exhibits particular weakness in the following key areas:

1. ☐ Thesis (focus and development)
2. ☐ Use of specific detail
3. ☐ Paragraphing (unity, development, coherence)
4. ☐ Sentence structure (comma splices, fused sentences, sentence fragments)
5. ☐ Awkward or garbled constructions
6. ☐ Verb usage (agreement, tense, form)
7. ☐ Pronoun usage (agreement, shifts)
8. ☐ Other grammatical faults
9. ☐ Diction
10. ☐ Punctuation
11. ☐ Capitalization
12. ☐ Apostrophe usage
13. ☐ Spelling

Comments:_____

Writing Assessment Workshop
Definitions

Holistic Assessment:

[4] + [1] samples will be easily recognized.

[4], "highly competent," samples demonstrate exceptional writing ability. The sample is well-focused, engaging, intelligent, and essentially free of grammatical and mechanical errors. (It contains no paragraphing, sentence structure, verb usage, or pronoun usage errors, is free of awkward constructions, and has few if any other faults.) If you are unsure how to classify a competent sample, assign it a [3], not a [4].

[1], "requires extensive remediation," samples exhibit numerous, serious, immediately evident writing deficiencies. [1] samples may be nearly incoherent or illiterate. Such samples exhibit a level of proficiency that indicates the writer may never achieve a reasonable level of writing competency or could do so only after undergoing an extensive program of individual tutoring, specialized classroom instruction, and dedicated practice. Such essays may be garbled or disorganized, show scant command of paragraphing and sentence structure, and contain numerous verb or pronoun usage, diction, punctuation, and spelling errors. Such writing fails to communicate effectively; it should not receive a passing grade if submitted as a high school assignment. If you are unsure how to classify a sample that exhibits some serious deficiencies, assign it a [2], not a [1].

[3] + [2] samples may be more difficult to classify.

[3], "reasonably competent," samples exhibit a degree of writing proficiency that is not clearly exceptional but would be acceptable without serious reservation in a college setting. It may contain a few lapses or careless mistakes and could be improved, but it does not exhibit any habitual writing deficiencies that would require tutoring or some remedial coursework to correct. It may contain a variety of errors, but is free of extensive awkwardness and habitual paragraphing, sentence structure, verb and pronoun usage, mechanical, and spelling errors. Two or more similar errors (in paragraphing, sentence structure, verb or pronoun usage, or elementary mechanics) in the same sample indicates a habitual writing deficiency that may require tutoring or some remedial coursework.

[2], "requires some remediation," samples are coherent and succeed in communicating effectively but demonstrate a degree of writing proficiency that would not be readily acceptable in a college setting. Such writing contains serious habitual weaknesses: usually revealed through two or more similar errors involving paragraphing, sentence structure, verb or pronoun usage, or elementary mechanics, or extensive spelling and diction errors. The level of writing competency could be improved significantly through tutoring or remedial coursework.

While both [2] and [3] samples are imperfect, [2] samples indicate habitual or extensive writing faults that should be dealt with through individual tutoring or remedial coursework. [3] samples contain less profoundm non-habitual defects that would more efficiently be dealt with in the context of a college-level writing course that presupposes understanding of structure, grammar, and mechanics and provides instruction, practice, and feedback in writing different types of essays.

Writing Assessment Workshop
Definitions

Analytic Assessment:

"Thesis": check here if the sample is incoherent, unorganized, or fails to develop or to address either of the two topics.

"Use of specific detail": check here if the sample contains very few or no specific details. Such details make the writing concrete, vivid, and engaging. They keep it from being too vague or abstract.

"Paragraphing": check here if the sample collapses two or more main points into one paragraph, fails to develop its main points, needlessly breaks discussion of one main point into two or more paragraph fragments, or collects seemingly unrelated statements in a paragraph unit. Samples consisting of only one long "paragraph" or containing any one-sentence or two-sentence "paragraphs" are highly suspect.

"Sentence structure": check here if the sample contains any comma splices, fused sentences, or sentence fragments.

"Awkward or garbled constructions": check here if the sample contains more than one awkward or garbled sentence.

"Verb usage": check here if the sample contains any verb-subject agreement, verb form, or verb tense errors.

"Pronoun usage": check here if the sample contains any pronoun reference errors (no antecedent, lack of pronoun-antecedent agreement, incorrect case) or more than one shift in number or person.

"Other grammatical faults": check here if the sample contains more than one instance of a predication error, misplaced modifier, flaw in parallel construction, shift in mood or point of view, or the like.

"Diction": check here if the sample contains any misuse of common words, repeated misuse of unusual words, or inappropriate word choice or level of diction.

"Punctuation": check here if the sample contains any errors involving semi-colons, colons, or end punctuation or habitual misuse of commas.

"Capitalization": check here if the sample contains habitual misuse of capitals.

"Apostrophe usage": check here if the sample exhibits any apostrophe usage errors.

"Spelling": check here if the sample contains three or more misspellings, excluding apostrophe usage errors.

"Comments": mention any positive qualities of the sample, expand on any area checked, or make a recommendation regarding the need for tutoring or remedial coursework.